1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

children are abhorred and every effort is made to get the woman married should she be pregnant. Although her shame is great, it is nothing compared to the problems that the new individual will encounter unless people come to accept his mother's agnatic kin group as his—and whether that group will in fact accept him as a member. The pariah status of illegitimate children is easily seen in the widespread belief that they can only marry others like themselves or people of slave status.

So much then for the first two features of kinship, those of genealogy and descent. The third aspect, that of marriage relations, brings us much closer to what is commonly thought of as family life in western society. Using the anthropological jargon, we can sum up the kinds of relations invoked by a Kanuri marriage by saying that Kanuri marriage is polygynous with virilocal residence patterns which have a patrilocal emphasis and an exceptionally high divorce rate. In plain English this means that the men can marry more than one wife, up to four by Islamic law (they are polygynous); the wife invariably leaves her home to go and live with her husband in a place chosen by him (they are virilocal); and, this often but not always proves to be in the vicinity of, or even inside, the household of the husband's father (there is a tendency toward patrilocality). Finally, most Kanuri marriages, the vast majority of them certainly, end in divorce.

Because a marriage usually involves the creation of whole sets of kinship links where none existed before, the way in which such changes are brought about and made "official," or publically recognized, is an important aspect in the anthropological study of marriage. Furthermore, such activities are also very important moments in the lives of the individuals concerned, who must see to it that all that should be done is done correctly according to traditional custom. Thus we start looking at marriage by describing its inception.

In thinking about a marriage the first question that any Kanuri man asks himself is whether he can afford it or not. That is, can he and those people on whom he can count for financial aid take on the expense of a marriage ceremony and bridewealth payments; and, if he can, how high can he go?

A man who already has a wife or wives knows that he must give gifts, supposedly equal to those going to the bride, to wives already married to him. He knows that the pressures for expenditures for drummers, food, transportation of the bride to his dwelling, and many other aspects of the ceremony, will very likely involve more of an outlay than he can readily predict. Can the capital be raised for such an undertaking? Most men are helped by their friends, their kin, and their political and economic patrons if they have any. Kanuri recognize the outcome of marriage expenses in their oft-quoted saying, "A man who is not in debt over a wedding is a man who has no friends."

Bridewealth payments form the basic marriage expense, and they can vary in size and elaborateness depending upon the status of the two family groups who are joined through the marriage, the marital history of the girl, the previous relationship of the groom to the girl's family, the bargaining power of each party to the marriage arrangement, and the time of year during which the payments are to be made. Although other factors can enter in and pull the bridewealth up or down in individual cases, these are the most effective determinants of bridewealth.

The payments themselves can be divided into three general categories, plus a "rebate." First there are one or more small gifts given to the girl and her rela-

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

tives, usually female relatives, in the name of the groom; these are called the *kwororam*, or the asking-a-question payments. Secondly, there are the formally recognized payments. The first of these is a large one called the *luwaliram*, given to the *luwali*, or the man who officially gives the bride to the groom and to whom she will return if she ever runs away or separates from her husband. This is followed several weeks later by a *sada'u*, a small fee given to the girl's family through her *luwali* on the morning of the wedding day. And thirdly there are a number of small payments paid out to the girl and her young friends, to the female relative(s) who accompany her to the groom's house, and to any unmarried sister she has left behind. The groom receives a few small gifts from the girl's family, and on the morning of the wedding day when the *sada'u* is paid, he receives gifts of money, clothes, and even on occasion a horse. He never knows beforehand, however, just how much or how little this "rebate" will come to in relation to his own outlay for the marriage.

When the status of the two families is similarly low, as it is in the vast majority of rural marriages, then there is very little worry over bridewealth. Generally it is not very high and almost standardized for the locality. An important man always pays more bridewealth because everyone believes he can afford it. Paying more for everything he does, including marriage, is one of the ways he validates or proves his higher social rank. An interesting insight is also gained when it is realized that not only is the status of the person getting married taken into account, but also the status of those whom he is associated with and whom he can count on for help. In our little town of Magumeri many people tried to have their daughters marry members of my household because, as they laughingly admitted, they knew I would help my household members with bridewealth, and my apparently wealthy status in Magumeri meant that payments could be set a good deal higher than usual for such a marriage.

No matter what the status of the two families may be, girls who have not been married before command a much higher set of bridewealth payments, and more of them. The magnitude is often three to five times as much and in extreme cases it goes even higher than that. Men tend to give more as they grow older and can afford it, while conversely women often receive less as they go from one marriage to the next. Kanuri say that a woman who has been married many times has been used a great deal and is therefore worth much less than others who have not had so many marriages and been used as much. On the other hand, if she remained with previous husband(s) for longer periods, has a reputation for quiet obedience, and staying inside the household, then the groom feels more confident about her and will pay more. Similarly if the women has borne children and has demonstrated her fertility, she is also worth more. Although some men know practically nothing about their wives to be, others investigate them and inquire into the reasons for previous marriage break-ups and so on. Was it because her previous husband beat her, or because she was an adulteress, or was excessively jealous of co-wives? Did she not perform her wifely duties properly, or show proper respect to her husband? Certainly some men like to know what kind of wife they are getting and this affects their willingness to pay bridewealth. However, it is not uncommon for a Kanuri man to say that he knew a particular wife for only a week, or perhaps just a day or two before they were married. In this case the woman's marital record is

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

alive (sororal polygyny) is an awesome idea, for it implies the sororate to them or wish for the death of a present wife. 595

In a few upper class households there are concubines who have the status of female slaves. These act as servants to the wives of the household and are used by the household head as sexual partners "any time you ask," as one informant put it. They are spoken of as being "half a wife." This refers to the fact that the husband gives them one half the amount of everything given to a wife. Generally they are too low in status to compete with the wives of the household unless they are considered exceptionally beautiful, or if they have given birth while the wife has not, and the child is recognized as that of the concubine. One informant very clearly explained his possession of concubines in economic terms. His household, he said, was very large, and he regularly fed twenty to forty people per day. This figure often increased to fifty or sixty on special occasions. The work of preparing so much food on time and regularly was simply too much for his wives, so he always has a number of concubines to help with the catering problems associated with his high status in the community. 595 565 [567]

Why do men want to get married? In answering this question men constantly reiterate cooking, food producing, and child-bearing. Cooking—to the unmarried man—is a most important point. Men never cook and if a man has no wife he must eat his food in the household of a relative or neighbor who is already married. This produces obligations by the unmarried man towards the married men which must be repaid with some service such as farm labor or running messages which signifies subordination. Thus a man with a wife can create obligation among unmarried men or at least avoid becoming obliged in this way to others. This is not, of course, the whole story. Women are also prized for their work in the fields. Indeed men estimate an annual increase or decrease in crop yield by referring, among other things, to the loss or gain of a wife. 581 562

Women on the other hand want wealth, although they often want freedom as well and more power in marriage than the culture allows for. This leads to trouble. But before we go into marriage itself, let us look at an actual case in which a man decides to marry.

Modu was twenty-six years old. He had been married twice; once for a period of nine months, then divorced and single again, then married a second time for a year and a half. In this he is no different from the vast majority (as high as eighty to ninety percent) of young Kanuri men his age. Now he was single again and living next door to his older-half-brother at whose house he was eating his meals. He wanted to take a wife and become independent of his older brother. He chose a new woman in the village about the same age as himself. She was visiting her elder brother who was a minor official in the district court. Minor though he was, his family was well-to-do and Modu was but a country peasant. The woman was beautiful and rather more sophisticated than local country girls, coming as she did from the city. Modu thought her most attractive in every way, even though gossip had it she had been married six or seven times. 58 159

Despite the gossip he decided to try and marry her, feeling that her past reputation made her available to the likes of him and not too costly in terms of bride-wealth. Late one afternoon he sent over some kola nuts using an intermediary; often people use old women for such purposes. [887]

1: Cohen E-4,5 (1956-1965) 1967 MS14 Kanuri MS14

often people use old women for such purposes. He was anxious about the gift and so went to an expert on medicines who gave him a couple of special kola nuts whose magical love potion power would direct the woman to find him irresistible. His confidence thus buoyed up, he visited her himself and they had a short affair. He tasted her cooking, observed her behavior, and after two weeks sent a friend to the older brother to arrange for the marriage payments. Three weeks later, after the marriage was proposed to the *luwali*, (in this case her older brother), the couple were married. Modu was delighted and later assured me that for most of the entire six months they remained married he was quite happy. In the end they quarreled bitterly because his wife was out of the house visiting much too often for him not to be suspicious of her fidelity. Finally he simply told her to pack her things and leave his house.

The case illustrates the ease with which Kanuri men and women moved in and out of marriage—a perfectly normal pattern in Bornu. Bornu is a land where divorces are very common, and a marriage break-up is never the social and psychological catastrophy it can easily be in the west. To understand why we must look more closely at Kanuri married life.

Married Life

By comparison with western society, Kanuri husbands are at home a great deal. The home is the center of activities where men take their leisure, visit their friends, and receive visitors all day long. If at all possible they carry out their occupational activities in the household making it the central location for their daily work. Such constant contact of husband and wife in the household is rather rare in western society. Paradoxically however, husbands and wives are far less intimate and friendly than they are in the west. In their daily lives, women cook, nurse young children, bring water for the household if there is no well, help in the fields, grow garden crops and maize in the back of the compound, prepare cooked and uncooked foods, make pots, trade, and visit one another to help with the preparation of ceremonies as well as for companionship and hairdressing. Men clear the fields and plant crops, work at a large number of crafts including modern ones such as truck driving or using Singer sewing machines; they also engage in religious activities as specialists, and carry out specialized political, judicial and medical roles.

In upper class families, women are in *purdah* (restricted to the household) and live at the back of the compound furthest away from its entrance. They leave the compound only on rare occasions and even then they must seek the permission of their husbands well in advance. They are usually accompanied on such excursions by servants who may escort the upper class lady half way across the emirate to visit her own family for a ceremony at which her presence is required. On the other hand, peasant women must go to the well at least twice a day for water, and in some villages this means a walk of several miles. These women work on the farm plots of the various members of the household during the short growing season and sell cooked foods. Ordinary women use the occasions away from their husband's households to meet and talk freely with other women, and sometimes, of course, with other men.

779 593 Trimingham says, "...Islamic law recognizes only the simple matrimonial family of man, wife or wives, slaves, and their children, and the Malikite system gives absolute authority to the husband as its head."[1] The Kanuri exemplify this aspect of Islam. 779 595 The polygamous family is the sole kin unit of any significance.

779 595 567 Islam further dictates that a man may have no more than four wives, though he may have any number of concubines. A concubine (chir) is a slave taken by her master as a spouse. [554] Slaves have long existed as a stratum of Kanuri society, but only members of the Kanuri aristocracy have concubines. The status of the concubine is recognized by Islamic law.

779 582 With respect to marriage and the family, Islam permits or specifically prohibits a number of practices which, when taken together, exert a profound influence on social organization. Cousin marriage with both cross and parallel cousins, is permitted under Islamic law. 779 58 Sadak, strictly defined, is the Islamic marriage payment by the husband to the wife. It is her property, and is conceived of as payment for her virginity. Though not entirely equivalent to a bride-price, sadak becomes part of the bride-price. As indicated above, virginity at the [595] time of a girl's first marriage is strongly stressed. Seclusion of wives (kulle) is valued. The wali (Kanuri luwali) who represents the fathers of both parties at the signing of the

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1. Trimingham, ibid., p. 126.

779 .58 [593] marriage contract, is a common Islamic feature. Sexual rights of the husband, as well as his responsibilities for the support of his wife, are supported by Islamic law. Lastly, Islam does not necessarily recognize marriage as a permanent arrangement; [182] consequently divorce is simple and commonly resorted to. All of these practices, commonly associated with Islamic societies, are characteristic of Kanuri society and are well integrated in Kanuri custom concerning marriage and the family.

D. The Community

162 [161] The population of Bornu Emirate is just over a million people. About one-third live in towns with a population of more than 7,000 (see Table I). Following Maiduguri, the capital, which has a total population of 83,327 including the outlying villages, but only 56,777 in the town proper, there are ten towns with populations exceeding 10,000. The average size of these ten towns is 13,879. There are 16 more towns in Bornu Emirate with populations of between 7,000 and 10,000. These 26 towns, plus Maiduguri proper, account for 325,640 people, almost a third of the population.

369 632 121 Although there may be some question whether a town with a population of 10,000 may properly be called "urban," it is clear that on the folk-urban continuum, such towns are distinctly approaching the urban pole[1]. These towns have few or none of the

1. If Miner can call Timbuktu, with its population of 6,500, a "primitive city," then these are certainly towns, or "urban centers." see Horace Miner, The Primitive City of Timbuktu (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953).

[TEXT CONTINUED ON PAGE 52]

582 793 583 [557] the motivations of the luwali in giving his ward. It may be that the mallam is attached to a large household organization. Then the marriage very closely resembles the previous type, except that the marriage payments to the girl's kin are reduced or waived because of the cultural definition of such a marriage as a charitable act by the wife-giver.

581 582 793 Again, a man may wish to express his gratitude to a mallam for supernatural aid in which the mallam utilized his special skills. This can result from medical aid, divination, or charms provided by the mallam. On the other hand, most individuals would be quite hesitant about refusing the request of a mallam for a girl, if such were made, because of the general awe in which he and his avowed supernatural powers are held in the public eye. For the same reason there is some anxiety connected to the giving of a girl to a mallam, for if anything should go wrong with the marriage and produce dissatisfaction on the part of the mallam, his powers of retaliation are very great.

582 793 This does not mean that mallams themselves receive all their wives through charity. One informant of about thirty years of age was a peasant mallam, who farmed and lived in Magumeri. He wrote charms for people, and officiated in a minor way at the ceremonies in his immediate ward of town. He had been married six times, almost always to one wife at a time, with the exception of about a one year period when he had two wives in his compound. Of these six marriages only one had been a nyia sada'abe (a gift marriage). He said that he preferred to obtain his wives like any other man, then he would owe no one any special obligations.

58 Nyia ardiabe (marriage by agreement) refers to marriages where the man and woman involved have a strong desire to marry one ano-

• 58 ther. The term "agreement" refers to the chief difference with previously discussed marriage types, for here the parties to the marriage are themselves the prime movers in its inception. As would be expected this kind of marriage union is most common among women who have been married before and through divorce have gained independence. The main responsibility for the decision to initiate the marriage comes from the man and the woman who are to be married. The connotation here is that the marriage is not being contracted for utilitarian purposes primarily, but rather for reasons of emotion, affection, and mutual desirability on the part of the couple. To the Kanuri who view marriage as being first and foremost a utilitarian relationship which creates satisfactory economic and social relationships, this marriage by "agreement" seems somewhat strange. Indeed, not many marriages of this type were referred to by informants.

That they do exist was indicated by one informant who told how he had made an arrangement with a young girl of his home town when they were both in their pre-pubertal period. They knew that they could not marry one another (a) because her luwali (guardian), in this case her father, controlled her first marriage, and (b) because of the differential ages at which the sexes customarily marry. The informant related how he was able, several years later, when he was about thirteen and the girl about eleven, (i.e. marriageable) to obtain a solution to his problem with the aid of a friend. The friend, X, aged about seventeen or eighteen, was in a family with slightly more resources than the informant's and his father wanted him to take a virgin as a first wife. X himself (according to the informant) desired a virgin whose own family valued her at too high a price for X's family to become seriously interested. The informant suggested to X that he marry his (the informant's)

58 little sweetheart and keep her until he (the informant) was grown adult enough to have her as a wife for himself. Because the bridewealth was in the range of X's family resources, X's parents decided, after having the idea suggested to them by the informant, to obtain the informant's "intended"for their son. Needless to say, they knew nothing of the informant's long term plan to marry the girl eventually himself. When the informant was nineteen or twenty, his little childhood girl friend divorced X and married him. The informant did not know whether X ever managed to marry the girl of his own childhood dreams, but thinks he did.

58 183 This rather extreme example is interesting for its illustration of how individuals growing up within a certain social structure can often work out arrangements whereby they skirt round the requirements of their culture, yet manage to maintain the system as a set of rules. The Kanuri recognize that all marriages cannot simply be lasting agreements made between groups of individuals comprised almost entirely of males, especially in Bornu where divorce is so simple and all relationships have a brittle edge.

587 The final stage in independence is reached in the last variety of marriage, nyia kolatabe (marriage of discovery), which by its very nature is confined to non-virgin women. This is the most widespread form of marriage among the population, becoming common after the woman has had her first divorce (or second in some high ranking households). Informants claimed that in this type of marriage, "There is no arrangement, you only meet the woman somewhere and decide to marry her." [[?]] Some Kanuri equated it with the Hausa tsintuna or propertyless marriage, i.e. where the kin are not involved either in the decision to marry or the exchange of property. There is, however, a bridewealth payment by the husband-to-be which is paid to the woman herself, and the marriage is still solemnized at a sada'ż ceremony as at all weddings.

437 The discussion of marriage has served to illustrate
583 attitudes and behaviour within contractual relations in which goods and services are exchanged between persons and groups. Bridewealth is given by the man and his group of relatives and friends to the girl and her group. The closer the marriage is to being the woman's first, the more likely it is that her lumali (dispenser of marriage rights) and kin group take the bridewealth payments rather than the woman herself. [426] [571] Men borrow from relatives, friends, and superiors to obtain the money for marriage expenses. Thus a man's social relational network in Bornu is an important part of his capital reserve.

• 58 The Kanuri classify marriages into two major categories - virgin or first marriage (female speaking) and marriage with a woman who has been married before. Marriages are further subdivided on the basis of the kinds of relationships established by the wedding. The relationship between the man and woman may entail the seclusion of the wife within the compound (nyia kulle). This is not strictly an either/or category but rather a matter of degree, since all Kanuri men like to see their wives remain in the compound as much as possible. However, only the upper classes can afford to maintain and enforce such a relationship. The remaining categories can be regrouped under two headings. Firstly, there are marriages in which a man obtains a wife by virtue of his relationship to an extended household organization and its head. The household head uses his lumali role (and in some cases his influence over other lumali) to either strengthen or create obligatory relationships with other men. In some cases, these unions take the form of cousin marriages (nyia durbe). In others, they merely emphasize already existing superior/subordinate relationships, while in still others, they serve as the initiating circumstance for an attempt at such a relationship. As we have seen, gift marriage (nyia

58 sada'abe) in which a girl is given to a Koranic mallam also entails the mutual understanding of an obligatory subordination by the mallam to the luwali.

Secondly, in marriages of agreement (nyia ardiabe) and discovery (nyia kolatabe), the major arrangements are made between the man and the woman alone without recourse or subordination to a household head. These marriages illustrate the adaptation of marriage arrangements to the realities of Kanuri social life. Given the large population and the high divorce rate it is not possible or feasible for all weddings to function as mechanisms for strengthening and creating superior/subordinate relationships. And so this second variety of marriage arrangement operates because many women, especially as they grow older, are not willing to be pawns used for the purpose of defining relationships between men. By the same token, many men are not willing to become obligated to others through marriage.

593 In the marriage relationship itself, there is a conflict
183 between the subordination that most Kanuri men expect of their wives and what they actually experience. It is held that this conflict is due to the woman's ability to subvert the cultural ideal of male dominance through his dependence upon her for much of his own status in
[565] the community. This is less true among the upper classes where the
[586] man is less dependent upon the woman for his status, and at this level there are few divorces.